

Chapter 10.

Memorial Tourism and Citizen Humanitarianism: Volunteers' Civil Pilgrimage to the "Life Jackets Graveyard" of Lesbos, Greece.

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Abstract

This chapter considers volunteer tourists as one of the expressions of citizen humanitarianism conceiving their "civil pilgrimage" to the so-called life jacket graveyard in Lesbos (Greece) as a fulcrum in the contribution to the politicization of citizen-humanitarian engagement. Lesbos - and in particular the life jackets graveyard - is nowadays an emblematic place of the "refugee crisis". The growth of structured grassroot organisations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) led to the emergence of volunteer tourism. People spend their holidays volunteering in Lesbos not only seeking to help, but to increase their awareness also through visiting the spaces exceeding those of the humanitarian intervention. In this context some places on the island became particularly symbolic: among them the best-known site is the life jackets graveyard. Drawing on ethnographic research it was possible to identify a relation between the phenomenon of volunteer tourism and memorial tourism. The contribution will look at the motives that bring volunteers to look for such memorial sites, at the

socially constructed meanings that such places carry and at how this relates to the role of humanitarian citizen.

Introduction

The island of Lesbos (North Aegean, Greece) has become an emblematic place for migration in the Mediterranean. Over the last two decades, an increasing number of people have arrived from Turkey seeking to reach Europe. During the “migrant crisis” from 2008-2015, the number of people rose sharply. According to UNHCR (2015), 500,018 people arrived on the island from January to December 2015, accounting for the 59% of the total arrivals in Greece and almost half of the total arrivals in the entire Mediterranean area (1,015,078) for that year (UNHCR 2016). Due to a lack of organic and efficient national and European response, at the end of 2015 several volunteers and grassroots organisations arrived in Lesbos to support migrants arriving on the shores of Lesbos, most of them Northern European countries such as the Netherlands, UK, Norway, but also from the USA and Australia. Some places around the island became symbolic for people who lived through those days, and those people who would arrive later.

In this chapter I focus on the relations between the phenomenon of volunteer tourism and the practice of visiting “sites of memory”, also known as memorial tourism. In particular, I focus on the so-called life jacket graveyard. This site is a dismissed landfill located between the towns of Molyvos and Eftalou on Lesbos, where life jackets and rubber dinghies - abandoned by migrants at arrival or washed ashore - were discarded. This site is particularly relevant because it carries a material and symbolic correlation to

the migrants' presence on, and passage through, the island, and specifically with reference to the tragedy of death at sea during the voyage. The life jacket graveyard has become one of the best-known symbols of the "refugee crisis" worldwide and it attracts large numbers of visitors, particularly volunteer tourists. It is important to note that the life jacket graveyard is a visual coagulation of various instances: for volunteer tourists it may configure as a place of memory while for politicians it becomes the evidence they use to promote repressive regulations towards migrants.¹

After presenting the context in which the humanitarian response began in Lesvos, I will discuss the conceptualisation of memory as a social construct. Through interviews and participant observation, I will examine the individual motivations that bring volunteers to visit memorial sites, including meanings they assign to such memorials and how this relates to the practice of citizen humanitarianism. Finally, I will investigate volunteers' practices and emotions at this site of memory. Taken together, I conclude that these motivations and sentiments regarding memorial tourism can be a mechanism to turn a generally depoliticized volunteer tourism into a form of transnational citizen humanitarianism that expresses contestations to border regimes.

Lesvos' Reception System and the Emergence of Volunteer Tourism

Even before the increasing arrivals that started in 2008, the Pagani detention centre in Lesvos, a government-run site to detain undocumented migrants and asylum seekers,

¹ On 20 September 2019, the Greek press reported that Taxiarchis Verros, the mayor of West Lesvos, had filed a request to remove the life jackets from the site due to environmental reasons (Kokkinidis, 2019). However, in February 2020, he transferred (and invited the citizens to follow his example) some of the life jackets to the construction site for a new reception centre as a sign of protest against new migrant facilities in the northern part of the island, where tourism is more developed and the local population more hostile to migrants (www.kathimerini.gr/1065068/gallery/epikairothta/ellada/mytilhnh-swsivia-kai-varkes-metanastwn-metafer8hkan-ston-xwro-poy-8a-ginei-to-kleisto-kentro-fwtografies).

had become a symbol of the inhumane conditions of migrants' detention (MigrEurope 2013). Following strong protests, the centre was closed and local activists from "The Village of All-Together" opened a centre called "Pikpa" on a former site of children's summer camp where people could be temporarily hosted - in acceptable conditions - before moving on to the mainland. In September 2013, in the village of Moria, about seven kilometres away from Mytilene, a new government-sponsored detention and registration centre opened on the site of a former military base. Since then, the Moria centre is jointly managed by the Greek police and FRONTEX² with assistance from UNHCR (Trubeta 2015).³ FRONTEX had begun working in Lesvos in 2006 (with a reinforced presence from 2011) while UNHCR began operations in 2009; both were immediately involved in the management of the Moria detention centre.

Changes to Lesvos accelerated in 2015. Another reception centre was opened at Kara Tepe, bringing the total to three on the island (along with Moria and Pikpa). Then in September of that year, the Moria centre was declared an EU Hotspot.⁴ Alongside the establishment of the Hotspot system, the EU and Turkey signed an agreement on 18 March 2016 aimed at stopping migrant's journeys in Turkey. Moreover, with the decision n. 4375 of May 31 2016 of the Asylum Service, Greece imposed the so-called geographical restriction on Lesvos, and the island was transformed from a transit point

² FRONTEX is an agency of the European Union headquartered in Warsaw, Poland, tasked with border control of the European Schengen Area, in coordination with the border and coast guards of Schengen Area member states.

³ In November 2019, the government announced the construction of new "closed facilities" to face the growing number of people arriving to the Aegean Islands (Hurst, 2019). At the end of February 2020, after the attempt by the local administrations to find alternative solutions (Smith, 2020), the government sent ten special squads (MAT) to face the protests against the construction of a new detention centre in Karava, close to Montamados (Alexandri, 2020).

⁴ A Hotspot is "an area in which the host EU Member State, the European Commission, relevant EU agencies and participating EU Member States cooperate, with the aim of managing an existing or potential disproportionate migratory challenge characterised by a significant increase in the number of migrants arriving at the external EU border" (Art. 2 (10) of Regulation 2016/1624, European Border and Coast Guard Regulation).

to a prison-island. Migrants were forced to stay in Lesbos for the whole procedure of the asylum request, which might take up to two or three years. Due to a continuing influx of migrants, a number of temporary camps were created in the northern part of Lesbos. At the time of the writing, only Stage 2 - a first aid and assistance UNHCR camp - is still active in the village of Skala Sikamineas, where people landing at the north point of the island are temporarily hosted.

These changes led to a decrease in the rate of arrivals on Lesbos starting with a sudden drop after 21 March 2016⁵ (UNHCR, 2017, 2018, 2019). In 2017, 11,570 people arrived in Lesbos; in 2018 and 2019, arrivals increased slightly with 15,034 and 27,049, respectively. Despite arrivals never reached again the numbers recorded in 2015, an increasing number of people were, and still are, hosted in the centres, detained for months or years in Lesbos as well as in other Aegean islands. In September 2018, a total of 10,941 migrants (N.C.C.B.C.I.A, 2018) were detained in Lesbos and by February 2020 that number had more than doubled to 21,725 people (N.C.C.B.C.I.A, 2020).

To this influx of migrants, initial responses came from local communities and individual volunteers (Skleparis and Armakolas 2016) and the formal humanitarian response arrived in Lesbos shortly afterward. As Daphne, a local resident and activist, put it:

At first there was no one on the island, only the local inhabitants, and the situation was very hard. [...] Nobody at the government would understand that there was

⁵ At the moment, only data on the national level are available for 2016. That year 173,450 migrants arrived in Greece, most of which arrived through the Aegean islands. However, the EU declared that since 21 March 2016 arrivals on the islands dropped of 97%, which means that most people arrived before that date (European Commission, 2019).

a real emergency. Only in September and October, some organisations began to arrive with volunteers, but before we spent months completely alone.⁶

Eventually thousands of people, from a wide range of national and international NGOs, grassroots organizations, activists and volunteers would arrive in the Aegean islands seeking to aid migrants (Tsilimpounidi & Carastathis, 2017).

There is no official public record of how many organisations and volunteers were on the island from 2015 up to the present. Many organizations were created ad hoc, often by people who had already volunteered on the island in previous months (Tjensvoll et al. 2017). Many aid groups were informal and did not register with local authorities, thus the data on the number of volunteers and NGOs that passed through Lesvos is highly uncertain. Tjensvoll et al. (2017) attempted an estimate that suggested between 2,060 and 4,240 volunteers worked on Lesvos from November 2014 to February 2016. In May 2018, the Coordination Committee for the Registration, Coordination and Evaluation of NGOs of the Secretariat General for the Aegean and Island Policy declared there were 114 NGOs operating out of Reception and Identification Centres and 7,356 volunteers working on Lesvos from 2016 onwards (Observatory 2018). However, it is important to note, these numbers have not been verified.⁷

The migrant crisis in the Aegean islands attracted journalists, photographers, celebrities, artists, filmmakers, activists, researchers, and many volunteer tourists (or

⁶ Interview held with Daphne Vloumidi, 08/05/2018. From here on, I will quote the interviews I conducted reporting the first name of the interviewee and the date when volunteers; I will use the full name of interviewees in case of “public figures”. I do not use pseudonyms but in one case, as one of the interviewees asked me to do so.

⁷ I had requested the latest data from the Secretariat General for the Aegean and Island Policy regarding the number of volunteers, who, in theory, should have been registered by the municipality of Lesvos. My request was rejected without explanation.

“voluntourists”) (Franck 2018, p.200). The expression volunteer tourist suggests that volunteers are engaged in travel (as defined by the UN World Tourism Organization) but with the purpose to “do something” for migrants while also acquiring new experiences to broaden their personal horizons and increase their awareness of social phenomena, such as a migration and refugee challenges (Trihas & Tsilimpokos, 2018). Daldeniz and Hampton (2011) distinguish between “VOLUNtourists” and “volunTOURISTS”, suggesting that for some persons the contribution of work for a cause takes precedence, while others are more focused on the travel and experience. In the case of Lesbos, my data show the majority of individuals identified as VOLUNtourists, but this self-identification does not blur their “tourist identity”; rather it is a renegotiation of what it means to be a tourist in Lesbos. The pure ideal of “humanitarian help” and the non-committal and “selfish” tourism are not to be strictly categorized in opposition. Volunteer tourism can be a new form of balanced social-spatial practice.

In Lesbos, volunteers are specifically a consequence of the “borderization” process (Cuttitta 2014) of the European islands in the Mediterranean and, as argued by Pallister-Wilkins (2017), their “humanitarian borderwork” is both a cause and an effect of borderscaping on the island. They are a consequence as volunteers go to Lesbos because of the desire to save lives and to assist migrants, which is connected to the border policies implemented at a national and international level; at the same time they are attracted by the discourses and narratives around this island that represent it as the heart of the refugee crisis. On the other hand, volunteers’ presence and humanitarian (and I add tourist) performances confirm those same discourses and become part of the production of the borderscape.

I consider volunteers from the point of view of tourism, looking at some of their practices that could be considered a form of memorial tourism. If we understand borderscapes as fluid, crossed and traversed by various bodies, narratives and practices (Brambilla 2015; Brambilla & Jones, 2020; Pallister-Wilkins 2017) in this concept we can include volunteers' visits to sites that are connected to the memorialisation of the migration phenomenon. If citizen-humanitarian spaces risk to be an active part of the border security apparatus, on the other hand they can potentially be spaces of resistance and solidarity (Stierl 2018; Pallister-Wilkins 2018; Tazzioli 2018).

It is in this context and from this point of view that I consider volunteer tourists as one of the expressions of citizen humanitarianism. Volunteers' practices in the field of refugee aid, even when addressed through NGOs (which in many cases, as for my case studies, have been created "from below" in Lesvos) exceed the goals and the spaces established by humanitarian organizations. In this sense, I will consider the relations between volunteer tourism - as an expression of citizen humanitarianism - and the spaces of memory, such as the life jacket graveyard, in order to interrogate what possible forms of countering the border regime can emerge from volunteer tourists' practices in these spaces.

Methods

I collected my data over four periods of fieldwork (13 weeks total) carried out between 2018 and 2019. While in Lesvos, I used participant observation, taking part in several activities alongside volunteers during their free time, sharing meals, spending evenings together, following their road trips around the island, and sharing an apartment with one volunteer. During my third period of fieldwork, I volunteered for about one month,

divided into two week-long periods, with two different organisations. I selected these organisations because they would allow volunteers to stay, respectively, for a minimum of 10 and 14 days, which enabled me to contact both short- and long-term volunteers. The first organisation is *Dråpen i Havet* (A Drop in the Ocean), a Norwegian NGO present in Lesvos since 2015, which started as a grassroots movement and now works in Lesvos, Samos, Athens (Skaramagas & Elefsina) and Nea Kavala in northern Greece. This group conducts educational and recreational activities with adults and children. They have hosted more than 6,500 volunteers in Greece since the end of 2015. The second organisation, Refugee4Refugees, was created by a Syrian man and a Spanish woman. They are based in Greece and operate in Lesvos and Samos. Refugee4Refugees also conduct recreational activities for children and collect and distribute donations to migrants. In Lesvos, they manage five to ten volunteers per week.

During my time in Lesvos, I conducted 36 semi-structured interviews, 27 with volunteer tourists and nine with other actors, such as local residents, organization employees, or representatives from the tourism sector. Interviewees were selected through snowball sampling: most of them were people I volunteered with in the above-mentioned organisations. Between February and July 2018, I collected 73 online questionnaires from volunteers who had worked in Lesvos between 2015 and 2018. For the questionnaires, I was able to contact 40 organisations by email and asked them to forward the questionnaire to their past and present volunteers. Furthermore, I posted a link to the survey on the Facebook page *Information Point for Lesvos Volunteers*, which allowed me to reach independent volunteers I had not been able to contact, or those who volunteered for NGOs. Both the interviews carried out in person and the written questionnaire were analysed qualitatively through the software Atlas.ti.

Memory-Work on Lesvos: the Case of the Life Jacket Graveyard

Memory “pertains to the actualization of the past in some form of contemporary experience” (Foote & Azaryahu 2007, p.126); specifically, collective memory refers to the memory of a lived experience and/or mythicization of it by a collectivity (Lavabre 2000). In this way, memory is “blind to all but the group it binds” (Nora 1989, p.9). In other words, there are as many memories as there are groups, and memories are manifold: specific, collective, plural, but also individual – whereas history does not belong (Nora 1989). Foote (1990) argues that memory has a twofold meaning, referring to beliefs and ideas held in common by a group of people “that together produce a sense of social solidarity and community” (p.380) and suggests that groups of individuals act jointly to uphold records of the past. Thus, memory is always socially constructed (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983; Foote & Azaryahu 2007), taken from the past and reconstructed in the present (Lavabre 2000), influenced by the current social, economic, cultural and political environments.

The migration memorial sites on Lesvos present a theoretical challenge related to this definition of memory as having two specific moments: a past and a present. In Lesvos, we see a fluid boundary between these categories. While 2015 is considered a watershed and symbolic year for migration to the island, the arrival and permanence of migrants on Lesvos is still continuing. Therefore, it can be said that we are examining the memorialisation of an ongoing phenomenon, which contrasts with the idea of memory as the actualisation of a clear, distinct moment in the past.

In the memorialisation process there are two main aspects that qualify the life jacket graveyard as a site of memory. First of all, as argued by Nora (1989) “without the

intention to remember, *lieux de memoire* would be indistinguishable from *lieux d'histoire*" (p.19). Considering history as an intellectual and secular production, according to Nora history preserves places or monuments as materials needed for its work. While *lieux de memoire* are dynamic, imbued with different meanings, open to remembering and forgetting, as memory can be manipulated and appropriated. Considering the life jacket graveyard, the word of mouth regarding visiting the site, the presence and passage of volunteers, their intention to understand and share stories, in other words volunteer tourists' practice of visiting this site, make the life jacket graveyard a *lieu de memoire*. Secondly, I see in the life jacket graveyard an early stage of the memory-work (Young 1997; Foote & Azaryahu 2007), meant as those above-mentioned processes of engagement with the past, which go beyond the historical reconstruction and include social engagement (Till 2008, 2012).

Memorial Tourism as Citizen-Humanitarian practice

To outline how the memory of contemporary migrations is shaped in the context of Lesvos, we must consider the social groups who share these common memories: migrants, local inhabitants and volunteers. These groups, though not internally homogeneous, share some common past, views and goals, and, at least, some similar activities and spatial practices. Drawing from Halbwachs' (1950) idea that there are as many memories as groups, in this study, the focus is on volunteer tourists who created a distinctive bond with the life jacket graveyard. As Philippa Kempson, resident in Eftalou and one of the creators of the *Hope Project*,⁸ told me:

⁸ Philippa and Erik Kempson are active since the very beginning of the "crisis" in Lesvos. They opened the *Hope Project* in 2018, where first need goods are distributed and where there is an open space for art and music.

It was actually the volunteers... [that turned the life jacket graveyard into a symbol] that place kind of erupted in October 2015, because there was nowhere else to put everything. And the volunteers were working with the rubbish collectors on the beaches to clean up... you could see the north shores of Lesbos from space... it was... huge.⁹

Today, the life jackets are piled in two large heaps, separated by a walking path between them.

The process of memory-work began with the volunteers who were in Lesbos between 2015 and 2016. At that time, when the landings were still frequent and intense, volunteers and NGO workers experienced the fatigue and witnessed the emotions of arrival first-hand: the fear of the sea, the joy of the arrival, but also the death of people who did not make it to the shore and those who passed away shortly after arrival. Regarding these experiences, Philippa said:

Nothing made sense anymore, the volunteers struggled with that and a lot of them who were going and coming back... they found solace just sitting among the life jackets... and it was the volunteers who called it the life jacket graveyard. Because it feels like a graveyard... it feels a memorial to what happened. [...] In 2016 you had volunteers coming back after 2015 who would just sit there. And they cry, and they pray, they just sit there quietly... I went a day up there and there was a group singing. It just feels like a memorial, which is where the name comes from. It's important for the volunteers to live through and talk through what happened to them.¹⁰

⁹ Philippa Kempson, 03/06/2019.

¹⁰ Philippa Kempson, 03/06/2019.

Volunteers are those most involved in the memorialisation of the life jacket graveyard and they exercised a great deal of control over the meaning in what Foote (2003) defined the early stage of the memorialisation process. Two other aspects of the life jacket graveyard are relevant here. First, the availability of Google Maps made the site more accessible, as one did not need a deep knowledge of the island to find the location. In other words, for sightseeing, Google Maps creates a “marker” (MacCannell 1976). Second, the life jacket graveyard was involved in a process of sacralisation that turns an artefact into a sacred object of the tourist ritual (McCannell 1976), a process that is strongly constructed also through the media (Selwyn, 1996) which often guide tourists’ gazes (Urry 1990). From 2015 onward, this “heart-breaking mountain”¹¹ became a symbolic place to the point where it began receiving comments and ratings on Google Maps, a level of attention augmented by the media, journalists, researchers, visuals on social media and simple word of mouth.

Tourism is, at least in part, a peculiar type of memory practice (MacDonald 2008; Sather-Wagstaff 2011). Ahmad and Herzog (2016) call tourism a fundamental part of the emerging regimes of memory that can be identified as a central instrument for the historicization of social, cultural, and public memory.

Furthermore, tourism – in this case, volunteer tourism – plays a fundamental role in the process of creating, preserving and modifying memory through practices. Indeed, it can be argued that tourism and memory are tied by a twofold connection. The first connection consists in tourists’ appropriation of memory (politically, spatially and socially) through their practices (Ahmad & Herzog 2016). In the case of the life jacket graveyard, the performance and consumption of the site (Sather-Wagstaff 2011) are

¹¹ Quote from one of the anonymous questionnaires.

evident. Volunteers make a “civil pilgrimage” to this symbolic place; they walk around, often serious and silent, and take a moment for reflection. Some people cry. Here, the aspects of the appropriation emerge through the visit, the bodily and emotional engagement with the place, and the discussion with other volunteers. For example, some NGOs organize trips which ensures that all their volunteers go to the site. Another group (or person) has constructed a small amphitheatre, using the boat engine shells as seats where people can sit and observe (maybe discuss) the site in front of them (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1 HERE

Figure SEQ Figure Arabic 1: Two volunteers observe the Life Jackets Graveyard from above. The boat engine shells at the bottom of the photo are often used as seats. Source: author's photo.

The second connection between tourists and memory is that they produce memories through their touristic experience, from an individual and collective perspective. Indeed, memories are the results of how and what we choose to remember of the places we visit and the people we meet. Individual and collective memory is often organized around material objects (Bærenholdt et al. 2004) such as photographs or souvenirs (MacDonald 2008). The assembly of memory happens in two different ways. On one hand, tourists make sense of themselves through narratives (Giddens 1990; Shotter 1993; Gergen 1994) and photography of the experience “is part of a theatre of narratives and memories” (Bærenholdt et al. 2004, p.105) and, thus, part of the production of identity and social relations. On the other hand, the act of taking and sharing photographs – especially through social media – contributes to the establishment of the subject of the photograph as a symbol, reiterating and producing that subject as a marker. Thus, tourists authenticate the symbolism of a place that inspired them to visit a site in the first

place (D'Eramo 2017). Moreover, tourists contribute to the geographical diffusion of knowledge around sites of memory "through the narrative, performative and visual culture of travel once off-site, post-visit" (Sather-Wagstaff 2011, p.22).

Indeed, pieces of the life jacket graveyard have been around the world by volunteers. These "splinters of memory" are both material and immaterial. They are shared as stories or as photos. Or they can be objects from the site: many organisations recycle the discarded life jackets and rubber boats into something new, either taking them from the life jacket graveyard or collecting them after new arrivals. Lesvos Soliday and Mosaik offer "safe passage" bags, which are then sold - as a sort of "civil souvenir" - to fund the project.

As discussed above, volunteers create an imagined community¹² at Lesvos (Anderson 1983): they "enact or outline citizenship in particular ways through their actions, [they] 'make' and act out citizenship collectively" (Kallio & Mitchell 2016, p.261). A community that is connected also through the strong emotions and experiences they share (Ahmed 2004). Spatial practices and embodied memories play a fundamental role in the construction of identity and community formations (Hoelscher & Alderman 2004; Legg 2007; Till 2012; Azaryahu 2012; Drozdowski: De Nardi & Waterton 2016), to the point that memory has been defined as a "concretion of identity" (Assman & Czaplicka 1995, p.130). In the next section, I will look at how this is one first element in which memory-work and the spatial practices related to the life jacket graveyard become part of the construction of a transnational citizen humanitarianism.

¹² This community is not only physically present in the space of the island but also online, through social media, blogs, websites, and other online platforms.

The social construction of a place of memory: volunteers' voices

Of the 96 total participants (including both questionnaires and interviews), 39 did not visit the life jacket graveyard. For other participants, their visit to the life jacket graveyard was the only trip they made during their stay on the island, often as one of the stops on a tour of north Lesvos, which was - and still is - where most landings happened.

Most volunteers visit the site due to word of mouth, which describes the site as "must see". As one volunteer, Ottar, told me: "quite a lot of those who have been before said 'you just have to go there'".¹³ Nicolay, another volunteer, defined the graveyard as a "tourist attraction" for volunteers.¹⁴

Many among the volunteers I interviewed see visiting the life jacket graveyard as duty and I interpreted this need as somehow functional to confirming their role and belonging to a specific community. By visiting this place, they visually confirm and "sacralize" the reasons why they have come to Lesvos through a staged performance which become part of the humanitarian borderscaping of the island (Cavallo & Di Matteo 2020).

The life jacket graveyard is the material evidence, as by Isabel, of "the magnitude of the problem [...] and also [a way to] humanize the numbers of people that we hear all the time".¹⁵ This is true also when *a priori* expectation were different from what was faced once in Lesvos. As for Hanne, who wanted to see the harsh and sad contrast to the happy time she had while volunteering:¹⁶

¹³ Ottar, 14/05/2019.

¹⁴ Nicolay, 11/06/2019.

¹⁵ Isabel, 20/05/2019.

¹⁶ Many volunteers underlined this sense of guilt. They argued that we were seeing only the "bright side" of the situation, which is made of those people who were able to get out of the camps and come for the activities with volunteers, while the "bad side" was not accessible to us.

If I'd be totally honest it's also because people talked about strong feelings and we are mostly seeing the happy side of the refugee lives when working at the community centre and sometimes it feels that we are as far from reality as when we are at home in Norway.¹⁷

Similarly, some volunteers wanted to see tangible and concrete evidence of what was happening, as if meeting migrants was not enough. As in the case of Maryam, they associated the life jackets with people's stories:

Because I deal with a lot of clients [*she works with refugees in the UK*] who came from the same route and when they tell me their stories, then I can imagine how they came, how it happened. For me I could relate it very much to my clients' stories.¹⁸

What Hanne was looking for, "the strong feelings", emerge when exploring volunteers' feelings and reflections following their visit to the graveyard, many indeed expressed strong emotions - typically sadness and frustration, in particular if relating the place to people's stories:

I found it really impressive. It's hard to describe the feeling you get there, but it's quite shocking and breath taking. It's a special place for me. It symbolizes all the people I met during my stay and my time in Lesbos. It's also a place where all the feelings come together. It's hard to describe, but I think the feelings of

¹⁷ Hanne, 03/06/2019.

¹⁸ Maryam, 15/05/2019.

hopelessness and the realization about how many people came to Europe looking for safety.¹⁹

It's a place where I felt sadness because I knew in every life jacket there was a person. I saw a swimming vest with ducks on it for a little girl or boy and I know that it can't save you in the sea. And there were life jackets torn apart and there wasn't any good stuff inside, only package paper inside. [...] So, it broke my heart. [*She starts crying*].²⁰

Emotions are "an active component of identity and community" (Hutchison & Bleiker 2008, p.63). They create ties among people to reinforce their sense of identity and group belonging due shared experiences (Mitchell 2016). And these strong emotions connect well with social movements, which are able to produce solidarities and enhance "people's capacity to act" (Arenas 2015, p.1125).²¹ Indeed, there were volunteers for whom their visit to the life jacket graveyard stimulated further reflection:

I think people should go there, it gives some of the history and at least now, when there are not so many boats arriving [...] it's a completely different situation. But going there and see this pile of life jackets gives a bit of the history and background and a sort of starting point for the whole thing. Why are these camps here, why are there all of these volunteers here, why are all the NGOs involved here? You can see more or less the starting point. Of course, it doesn't say it on the thing, you just see a pile.²²

¹⁹ Olivia, 04/06/2019.

²⁰ Bea, 12/05/2019.

²¹ This does not exclude the fact that there are also negative emotions and thus the emotionalization of memorial places does not automatically turn them into a social peacekeeper of collective memory.

²² Ottar, 14/05/2019.

I know that the visit is also a time of reflection, because some people unfortunately lost their lives, so... you get this emotion as well. But then you start asking yourself a question: is it that some people drowned in the water, or is it because of the political situation, or is it because how different nations talk to each other? Why did I need to leave Poland, why did those people have to leave their Countries?²³

From this last comment, we can see a connection the speaker draws between her own life and the refugees' experience (see Stavinoha & Ramakrishnan, this volume), opening to further reflection on the causes of what is going on in Lesvos.

From the quotations reported so far, is evident that while many volunteers visited the graveyard as a way to gain understanding or stronger impression of the phenomenon. Nonetheless, a few volunteers (mostly among those who stayed for a longer time) expressed skepticism about visiting the life jacket graveyard. Christos explained his position this way:

I see things daily: I see volunteers, I see refugees, I interact with them, I talk with them, I spend 12 hours a day with them, and then... I've focused, I've read a lot, I've researched, I have done a very good dissertation. So, I know things behind the headlines, the life jacket graveyard for no reason gives me something to go and see, it's a place where they store life jackets. For me that's it.²⁴

While other, as seen above, either expressed the idea of the life jacket graveyard as a place that could raise some personal question, or spoke about how the site could be used to raise awareness about migration issues:

²³ Kasha, 24/05/2019.

²⁴ Christos, 02/06/2019.

I really wanted to go [...] because someone would make out of it a graveyard to raise awareness and have a good impact, so I was thinking if I would be emotional or if it would have a good impact thinking that people are getting aware of it and yeah... doing something out of these horrible life jackets.²⁵

Most volunteers believed the presence of the life jacket graveyard would be important to raise awareness, and that their own visit to the site would be useful to the same ends. Following their visits, they would be able to talk about the graveyard (and the migrant crisis on Lesbos) to their family and friends:

It was heart-breaking over there. For the people at home I thought it was necessary to know that. Because every person in Moria, or in Samos, is coming over the sea. And they all had life jackets on them, so I thought it was very important to show people at home to raise awareness.²⁶

Some volunteers suggested building more structure into the site to make it an official monument that could amplify the messages and raise awareness beyond the community of volunteers:

I think that there should be structure [...] because you could raise a lot of awareness... things like journalist coming and hearing about this life jacket graveyard, taking pictures, publishing them. Everyone being aware that Lesbos is one of the islands where refugees arrive in very bad conditions... and I think it would definitely raise awareness. And I think that if it was in a nice place more people would go, and maybe more people would understand the situation, the

²⁵ Juliette, 13/05/2019.

²⁶ Bea, 12/05/2019.

locals should go. [...] I would think it's more important for locals to go or tourists. [...] I posted stories on Instagram and I received ten messages of people asking "where is this? Oh my god this is terrible" so I'm sure that more people will come, because I'm sure that tourists who come to Lesbos know about the situation and they will hear about this life jacket graveyard and will go, they'll feel sad, angry and frustrated once again, but then I think something more organized and clean will come out of it. Maybe there will be a decision by the local government to put it somewhere else, so it attracts more people.²⁷

For some volunteers, however, critical thinking about the meaning and interpretation of the site led them to view the life jacket graveyard as a possible element of sterile pity. Kaayin said memorializing the site might feed "this idea of 'poor people'... I don't like the idea of pitying refugees. [...] I think what the life jacket graveyard does is that in many cases [...] to make it seem more 'those poor refugees'".²⁸ Kaayin words relate to what Fassin calls the "humanitarian reduction of the victim" (2007, p.517), but she challenges it and the humanitarian gaze usually applied to migrants in citizen humanitarian - but not only - context.

The critical reflection inspired by the graveyard could also, some volunteers suggested, stimulate advocacy in Europe and influence the way the EU manages immigration:

Obviously, many people when they come here and they see all these sad things they either already question the policies or they start to question them, but [...] I didn't see it as resistance [...] It was more about advocacy than resistance. Like spreading the message of what is that it's not working in the system or we need

²⁷ Juliette, 13/05/2019.

²⁸ Kaayin, 16/05/2019.

help, or we need to change this... that is our "resistance" ... I think it's more empathy.²⁹

Holding different positions and perspectives, many of the interviewees highlighted criticisms. Ottar, for example, spoke with bitterness, seeing the life jacket graveyard as a symbol of the failure of the European Immigration System:

I think... at least at the moment is an important place to show, it's a monument to the failed refugee policy, at least on the European level. So, I don't think you should be in Lesvos and not visiting it, I think it's important at least to see the remnants of what it was, what still is. [...] And then people can put on ideas and feelings of what should have been done differently. I don't... think I would see it as a site of resistance, but again as a strong symbol of the failed refugee policy... and yeah... that failed quite a lot.³⁰

From these examples, we can see that volunteers are not simply consuming the mainstream narratives of the memorial. Rather, they engage their own subjectivities and personal stories within such narratives, thus creating new meanings and interpretations (Sather-Wagstaff 2011). As Mark underlined:

Memorialisation of events is very politicized. So, it's better that it's not politicized by the state, or even by non-state organisations. At least with the life jacket people can take away what they want from the experience, it's not pack element what to think.³¹

²⁹ Heta, 09/05/2019.

³⁰ Ottar, 14/05/2019.

³¹ Mark, 27/05/2019.

Conclusions

This chapter has considered the life jacket graveyard as the fulcrum of the recognition of volunteer tourism as a form of citizen humanitarianism. Indeed, outside their volunteer work, volunteers act to confirm their role and participation in the community through their acknowledgment of the life jacket graveyard as a place of memory, through their “civil pilgrimage” to the site, and their spatial practices at the site itself. The tourist practice of visiting a place of memory, and the emotions that arise, become the elements that tie together this transnational citizenship, founded on humanitarian basis.

The volunteers in this study expressed the need for a deeper understanding and knowledge about the migration crisis and the moral imperative to spread awareness about the situation. This work is happening through the visualisation and performance of visiting this site, and through the circulation of material and virtual pieces (in the media and social media) of the life jackets. If, on one hand, there are some people like Mark who argue: “I think a lot of people want to understand oppression”,³² – thus naming what is happening in Lesvos as “oppression”³³ – in general it seems that a more radical criticism – and sometimes a clear understanding – of the border regime and the borderization of Lesvos is missing. This sentiment is supported by statements from Heta and Ottar who argue that, though there is the acknowledgement of a political system

³² Mark, 27/05/2019.

³³ A term that carries a strong political connotation.

failure, they do not consider their volunteer work and the visit of the life jacket graveyard as forms of resistance.

The reasons for the lack of a deeper politicized challenge can be found in Butcher's conception of volunteer tourism as "an individualistic, narcissistic, and incredibly limited approach to politics" (2011, p.75). Butcher's conception is part of a broader scholarly approach that sees humanitarianism as an individualized challenge of being a caring, responsible, and active citizen of the world, thus risking hiding the structures of global capitalism that generate and reiterate inequality (Mostafanezhad 2014; Sin et al. 2015). In other words, emotional modes of governmentality connected to humanitarianism contribute to a "depoliticized global 'care citizenship'" (Mitchell 2016, p.290). In general, we must keep in mind the wider literature on humanitarianism and its critiques, such as Fassin's who describes the formation of a humanitarian government over the last few decades (2011).

However, the other side of the coin must still be considered before drawing final judgements. Mostafanezhad writes "[B]y paying attention to how the good intentions of volunteer tourism participants can have negative consequences we can begin to re-assemble the popular humanitarian gaze [... and] open up new spaces for collective and political action" (2014, p.116). It is from this standpoint, I believe, that even though the actions or positions of volunteer tourists may often not be politically radical, the volunteers in Lesvos are questioning the status quo by virtue of their experience. I argue that the interplay between the territorialisation of the experience and the deterritorialization of its echoes play a fundamental role in this sense (Mitchell 2016). The non-official memorialisation of the life jacket graveyard is an example: the word of mouth that reaches people all over the world and that pushes many other people to it,

the questions the site inspires, and the need to confront each other about migration that volunteers express - all are significant. Such analysis does not neglect the strong powers in play and the role that humanitarianism has in the securitization of borders, neither wants to be the umpteenth element of moving the focus away from essential challenges, such as just and equal possibilities of free movement for everyone. On the other hand, I argue that it may be seen as the sprouting of a specific political subjectivity derived from citizen humanitarianism. This position, that volunteers derive from the experience (and from their practices of memory-work), could be viewed as an intermediate stage between activism and depoliticized voluntourism. And this stage could be middle passage fundamental to opening cracks that allow more radical positions and actions to infiltrate citizen-humanitarian practices.

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Sitography

Information Point for Lesvos Volunteers:

ww.facebook.com/groups/informationpointforlesvosvolunteers/.

Googlemaps:

www.google.com/maps/place/Lifejacket+Graveyard/@39.3643872,26.1998616,17z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m5!3m4!1s0x14ba9b1eb98bc80d:0xd6a2a8f241ee423c!8m2!3d39.3643872!4d26.2020503

Lesvos Solidarity: <https://lesvossolidarity.org/en/>

Mosaik: <https://lesvosmosaik.org/>